

CHRISTIANITY and CRISIS

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PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION
& EDUCATION

A Christian Journal of Opinion

Laos and Cuba: Problems for Review

At the turn of the year, CBS and NBC called in their overseas correspondents for a survey of the problems America faces in the cold war. They disagreed on many points, but there was striking agreement on one—that even friendly nations regard our policy as one of drift and lack of initiative.

They agreed that Africa, which will engage the attention of the world for at least the next century, had been given too little attention. The confusion in the Congo is typical of the whole continent. We speak too simply of "African nationalism," for the continent is in a welter of tribalism below the level of integral nationhood and pan-Africanism, which is simply the rebellion of the black man against the white man's dominion. The white man has been a tutor in civilization to these primitive cultures. Unfortunately, his arrogance has so outraged the black man that the creative features of the impact of European civilization are forgotten in the fever of this resentment.

The new Administration has wisely appointed an Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. A new department will not solve the tangled African problems, but it will at least assure that they will not be neglected. Certainly we cannot allow again that Mr. Khrushchev should pay more attention to the new nations of Africa at the UN General Assembly than we did on our home grounds.

The correspondents were also in striking agreement on the dubious character of our attitude toward Laos, carved out of the Indochina empire

and significant only as the tiny buffer between pro-Western Thailand and Communist North Vietnam.

It is no secret that Laos, in which only ten per cent of the population knows anything about politics of any kind, not to speak of international politics, would be dangerous to either side only if the other side dominated its government. Our European allies thought a neutralist government would be the best solution. But we, long after the Dulles era, were satisfied with nothing less than a pro-American government. We have spent millions in vain to secure such a government; while some of our agencies supported the neutralist government we gave military assistance to the rightist, anti-Communist rebellion against the neutralists.

Perhaps we should have consulted more frequently with our allies. Certainly we should review our too inflexible policy of condemning neutralism out of hand. Neutralism may have a creative part to play not only in Laos but in the whole world.

We also need to be aware at least that our inflexible attitude allows Russia to gain the sympathy of many neutralist nations who desire to avoid commitment in the cold war. A nation admonished in its infancy by George Washington to avoid entangling alliances should really have more of a grasp of the instinctive reactions of new nations than we seem to have. On this, as on many issues, we look hopefully to the new Administration for a critical review of our policy.

The Cuban situation, not akin to the Laotian

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crisis, is probably as dangerous. The progressive deterioration of our relations with Cuba can be blamed on the outgoing Administration only by extreme partisans. The Administration was fairly patient with the growing anti-American sentiment and the expropriation of American property by the revolution. Nor did it meet the hysteria of the Fidelists with hysteria. Anti-Americanism is the stock in trade of Latin American revolutions, whether of the Right or the Left. The inclination of all administrations, Republican or Democratic, to be nice to any established government so long as it does not upset the apple cart made us rather complacent about the vexatious Batista regime. Hence the anti-Americanism of the Cuban revolution also has a specific cause.

Without holding the Administration responsible for all the problems brought to light by the Cuban revolution, it may still be fair to question the wisdom of breaking off diplomatic relations in the last hours of the old Administration. The President rightly speaks of the harassments to which we have been subject, including the absurd charge before the United Nations that we are contemplating an invasion. Behind this charge, however, is the fact that Cuba became an issue in our Presidential campaign. Mr. Kennedy aroused fear even among his supporters by his statements about Cuba, and

Mr. Lodge insisted that we would fight to maintain our Cuban naval base.

Perhaps we should review this policy. In fact, our whole policy of foreign naval and air bases, whether in Cuba, Japan, Morocco or Saudi Arabia, is certainly due for a rigorous re-examination. Can we really gain security by forcing our bases on reluctant small nations, particularly when military technology is producing guided missiles that make many bases obsolete? Here again both the Cuban and Laotian crises exhibit, above and beyond the specific strategic and political problems of particular geographic areas, some aspects of the general strategic and moral problems that everyone hopes the new Administration will review.

The democratic alternation of responsibility for government between the parties has many virtues in addition to being a convenient instrument for allowing the voter, who does not initiate policy, to make his choice between alternate policies. Sometimes the alternation prevents a new policy from becoming the sole property of the party that initiated it and establishes it as the general and agreed policy of the whole nation. Sometimes, as in the present alternation, it permits a fresh look at old policies, which may have become too inflexible.

R. N.

Statistical Morality

THE FIVE principal world religions of revelation had their inceptions, from the sixth century B.C. to the sixth A.D., at times which in retrospect seem very simple. The family and very small neighborhood groups were dominant units of society. It is no accident that the word pastoral has both a rural and a religious meaning.

The ordinary man of those days had little or no contact, either through travel or communication, with distant parts of the world. His problems of conduct were almost exclusively those which concerned his direct personal relationships with a few other individuals. He had no moral problem relative to masses of distant persons, partly because of lack of knowledge, and partly because he simply

was incapable of doing those distant masses either good or harm.

Decisions that affected large numbers of persons were taken only by a very few leaders in high positions. "I am my brother's keeper" and "Love thy neighbor as thyself" were precepts within which the words "brother" and "neighbor" had intimate, restricted and easily recognizable meanings. Under those circumstances the conscientious Christian, for example, could turn to the basic teachings of Christ and could find direct and clear guidance.

But the conditions of living on this planet have vastly changed. What happened last night in the Congo accompanies the early morning coffee in my home on a hilltop in Connecticut; and the great jets often fly directly over our house as they slant down the great circle routes, a few hours out

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of Europe. The bombardment cross-section of an atom of a rare element is a figure which, whether he is conscious of it or not, is of import to every living person. Wild virus that could cause new diseases can be transported in a few hours, latent within the body of a tiny insect, from tropical rain forests to great cities. A nuclear test spews radioactive poison up to high altitudes where it is carried, partly by slow drift but also by strange jet streams of high velocity, to points thousands of miles away.

Every Decision Has a Moral Aspect

All this means that now, not only as a philosophical ideal but as a practical and operative reality, no man is an island. Decisions are commonly made that affect the complex and interrelated interests of literally millions of human beings. The world is now one neighborhood, and all men are, in the sense of very real dependence, brothers.

This confronts modern man with moral problems of a new type. I have on a previous occasion suggested the importance of considering "statistical morality." Let us examine here some of the implications of this rather strange phrase, which couples an ancient philosophical noun with an adjective that is so specially characteristic of the present-day scientific viewpoint.

It would not serve my purpose to write in generalities, for I am convinced that this matter has become very concrete and tangible. Let us, therefore, consider a few specific problems, selected out of a list that any thoughtful reader can extend.

In our Western Christian system of ethics we have a very great repugnance to any procedure whereby society destroys the life of a specific, known, innocent individual. I am not referring to the problem of capital punishment of the seriously guilty, but rather to procedures such as war, traffic, adulteration of air, etc. that affect the innocent.

We all recognize that when we fight a war persons are going to be killed, sacrificing their lives for the common purpose. But it is a great comfort that we do not know in advance just *who* will be killed, or *where* or *how*. I have the impression that, even under desperate circumstances, our own military tradition would not command, and probably would not even permit, individuals to undertake a mission that meant *certain* death.

A commander must of necessity order actions in which it is assured that, say, ten or twenty per cent of the combatants will die. This ten or twenty per cent is, in due course, very dead. Each case is a personal tragedy of the most poignant sort:

but when the decision is made, it is a matter of probability and statistics, not a question of the certain death of known and identified individuals. For some reason we can take an attitude toward the statistics that is as cold and unfeeling as are the bodies of the ultimately dead.

Who is the "Neighbor"?

Or take a less gruesome example. Consider the position of a top official or a member of the governing board of a great company such as the American Telephone & Telegraph Company. This company has over one million seven hundred thousand stockholders, and, together with their principal subsidiaries, nearly three quarters of a million employees. It provides a communication service the efficiency and reliability of which affects every aspect of our national life, from defense and over-all economic vigor down to the corner grocery store and the home with a sick child. The stockholders have a right to a fair return, the employees have a right to their jobs, the officials have the rights and responsibilities of leadership, and every person in the country is ultimately affected by an improvement or a decay in the service provided. A great company such as this has a broad and general responsibility to the society that supports it and makes it possible.

I would argue that practically every decision that confronts the management of such a company has a moral aspect. How much money, for example, should such a company take away from dividends, take away from the needs for growth and capital improvement, take away from basic research or technological activities, take away from employee benefits—and donate for scholarships and fellowships and the general support of higher education? Just who is the "neighbor" here, and how many "brothers" are involved?

My third illustration will probably seem grotesque and even tedious to some. Each recent year almost forty thousand deaths have occurred in the United States from traffic accidents. A large number of these result from drunkenness, criminal carelessness, the amoral irresponsibility of young persons, etc. Every conceivable effort should of course be made to eliminate such causes. But when these have been reduced to a minimum (and let's face the fact that this minimum will still be substantially above zero); it remains true that the volume and complexity of the traffic that our society demands, and the speeds and masses of the vehicles involved, combine to assure that there will continue to be deaths. These deaths are the price

that our society has decided to pay for the benefits, both real and assumed, that it gets from automobiles.

When speed limits are set and when the practical facts of degree of enforcement are decided, do the responsible officials recognize that they are facing problems of statistical morality? Do the automobile manufacturers stay awake nights because they produce the means by which persons may be killed, do they take satisfaction in the very real contribution they make to modern society, and (here's the rub) do they ever put these two conflicting elements to moral comparison? I am confident that they do not, and that they would consider this question foolish or unfair. Admitting that hundreds of decent, sober and careful drivers will be killed along with their families (not to mention pedestrians), one's conscience is insulated from this horror by the fact that these are all unknown and future items of vital statistics.

A friend of mine who has a stubborn and original mind carried out an analysis of the question "Do enough persons die in traffic accidents?" The question may seem ridiculous and offensive at first glance. But if society does, in fact, enjoy a benefit from automobile traffic, and if the sober fact is that we must try to balance this gain against the losses caused by traffic accidents, then impossibly difficult as this may seem, it is fair and reasonable and, in fact, necessary to face the question.

The Morality of Genetic Risk

It would be easy to cite other illustrations involving various aspects of public health, the contest between food and population growth, the problem of smoking and lung cancer, etc. But I choose for my final example the one that seems to me to present in the clearest and most compelling way the essential character of these new problems of statistical morality. This example deals with the biological risks from fallout.

It is not my purpose to argue here that nuclear testing is or is not justified or necessary. Nor do I wish to debate the magnitude of the radiation dose due to past or possible future nuclear explosions, nor the difficult and still uncertain matter of the genetic danger due to long-continued exposure to relatively weak radiation.

My questions will involve illustrative figures that you may, if you prefer, view as pure assumptions, for the moral questions do not disappear if the figures are changed. I think it is fair, however, to remark that I take these figures from past discussions of responsible and informed persons.

A nation is considering a program of nuclear testing that will result in fallout, varying somewhat from place to place, of course, but distributed eventually over the entire planet.

Now it is reasonable to suppose that all the persons now alive on this earth will produce, before they all are dead, something of the order of fifteen thousand million babies. Suppose that, due to this testing of nuclear weapons, the fallout increases by only one part in 5000 the genetic risk (of congenital malformation, mental defect, epilepsy, cutaneous and skeletal defects, visual and aural defects, etc.) to which this vast set of babies will be subjected. The previous genetic risk, as due to the inescapable background radiation (cosmic rays, radioactive content of rocks, etc.), the diagnostic and therapeutic use of medical X rays, and perhaps other causes as well, is of the order of two per cent, in the sense that about two out of every hundred babies born have had such defects from genetic causes. If this small risk is increased by the fallout by only one part in 5000, does this raise any moral issue? Is not so small a risk "negligible"?

There are, it seems to me, two main points involved. First, as regards responsibility, it is important to note that this would be a risk imposed essentially uniformly upon every man, woman and child on this earth, entirely without their consent, and for the most part even without their knowledge. And second, as regards the arithmetic, even so small a risk when applied to so large a population of babies involves, as its most likely result, 6000 additional handicapped infants in the first generation, with the greater part of the damage (say nine-tenths of it) left to be imposed on later generations.

Thus the issue begins to be more sharply focused. It is wicked to kill a person. Is it, or is it not, wicked to subject a million persons to a chance of death of one in a million? In the latter case the victim (or victims, for their may easily be more than a single death in such a case) is comfortably hidden from the person who makes the decision. It is some unknown, never identified person who, again just on the grounds of probability, is likely to be in the interior of China or India or Russia.

Unfolding Christian Principles

Such a question was meaningless twenty centuries ago. But such questions are very real today. Individual morality was very effective in the past and it continues to be vitally necessary today. But

can our religious philosophers not start from the wise premise of the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount and derive useful guides of conduct for present-day problems?

I am myself convinced that the basic principles of Christianity are of permanent value, and that they are capable of interpretation to meet any modern or future necessity. I cannot "prove" the validity of this conviction, nor can I sustain it on more broadly intellectual grounds. (Note that no mathematician is able to "prove" the axiomatic basis, such as the one immediately following, for any branch of his subject.) But I am nevertheless convinced.

Perhaps the situation has some rough elements of parallelism with the following. Starting with the undefined concepts "zero," "number" and "successor," the Italian mathematician and logician Peano based the entire theory of the arithmetic of natural numbers upon five basic propositions.

- (1) Zero is a number.
- (2) The successor of any number is another number.

- (3) There are no two numbers with the same successor.
- (4) Zero is not the successor of a number.
- (5) Every property of zero, which belongs to the successor of every number with this property, belongs to all numbers.

Now these statements may appeal to you as completely sound and acceptable. They may even have a very fundamental ring. But can you at once use these statements to resolve two integers into their prime factors so as to find their greatest common divisor? Can you, in fact, directly use this axiomatic basis to check up your monthly bank statement?

The answer, of course, is that a vast amount of careful development is necessary in order to unfold from such an axiomatic beginning all the useful and practical truth therein contained.

Thus I am not questioning the soundness or permanence of the basic principles of the Christian faith. I am suggesting that it is necessary that the truths within these principles be unfolded and developed to the point that they may usefully be applied to modern problems of statistical morality.

Statistics: Important But Not Enough

ROGER L. SHINN

WARREN WEAVER plunges us into the midst of the dizzying ethical issues of our day. In response to his concluding plea I shall sketch some directions that Christian thinking may take as it faces modern perplexities. I shall do so in terms of three theses: I. Some aspects of ethics can never be reduced to statistics. II. Historical Christian ethics has already done some of what Mr. Weaver asks. III. Christian ethics needs to do far more.

I.

In pointing to the non-statistical side of ethics I have no desire to deny the importance of numbers. As a company commander in battle I once faced the grim decisions that Mr. Weaver describes. Where commanding generals have the luxury of thinking in terms of five or ten per cent casualties, company officers must sometimes face 50 to 100 per cent losses. Where society can think of slight probabilities of death (e.g., from automobile accidents), combat officers give orders that mean highly probable, almost certain death. Mr. Weaver well depicts the melancholy comfort I got in never

knowing *exactly which* men would die by my orders—and the help to my own morale in knowing that I always had *some chance* to go on living. I quite appreciate the statistical argument he makes.

Therefore it is all the more perplexing to point out the element in Christian ethics that defies all such calculation. What shall we do with Jesus' shepherd who leaves 99 sheep in the wilderness to seek one who is lost? Or with the greater joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 who need no repentance?

Such sayings persist with a haunting power even in our society, where few of us herd sheep. Many a modern writer has worried over Ivan Karamazov's question: would it be justifiable to make all men happy if the cost were the torture to death of one innocent baby? Christians and skeptics have rivaled each other in the passion they have brought to this question. Christians, responding to Christ's teaching, have answered "no." Skeptics, following Ivan, have given the same answer, turning the question into a rejection of God. Both have seen in this poignant, anti-statistical question a touchstone of morality.

Actuarial tables can never encompass the mean-

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ing of the sentence that comes as close as any to expressing the heart of Christian ethics: "Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mt. 16:25). If this ethic is peculiarly Christian, we must also recognize that all high ethics has some element of the heedless and irrational. The saints of the Church and the heroes of mankind have acted with a valor that forgets prudence.

The nation awards the Congressional Medal of Honor for valor "above and beyond the call of duty." Duty requires the risks of statistical probability of death in battle. Heroism goes beyond statistics. Often the modern world recognizes the unique quality in ethics that can never be quantified. Lewis Mumford has written: "...a life sacrificed at the right moment is a life well spent, while a life too carefully hoarded, too ignominiously preserved, is a life utterly wasted." Albert Camus has objected to capital punishment, not because of the numbers killed but because of the calculated brutality in executing a single person.

These high insights of ethics cannot easily be institutionalized. The judge cannot simply forgive criminals in impulsive love. He must weigh concern for the offender against concern for prospective victims. Yet even here our society transcends statistics, believing that it is better to let ten criminals go free than to imprison one innocent man. Thus the traditional Christian concern for the person affects us today.

II.

The problem of moving from Christian insight to institutional policy is an old one in Christian ethics. The exalted quality of the Gospel leaves what Roland Bainton calls "the gap in the New Testament ethics at the point of politics." If Christian faith were a political system, it would long ago have become obsolete. Because it is not such a system, it presents men with the continuous problem of working out a Christian social ethic in each age.

The greatest of the historians of Christian ethics, Ernst Troeltsch, developed his whole analysis around this issue. He emphasized the point Mr. Weaver puts so forcefully—that the New Testament in its language, its examples, its prescriptions for conduct is more immediately appropriate to an intimate rural society than to an industrial world. It shows how the Good Samaritan helps a person in need, not how a modern nation achieves economic justice.

Whenever Christians have accepted responsibility

for ethics in large-scale society, they have sought to fill the gap. Thus Augustine hailed the *pax Romana*, not as the peace of God but as a social value. Medieval ethics called on the Old Testament concern for social righteousness and the Greek philosophical concept of justice embodied in natural law. Luther distinguished between the pure ethic of the Gospel and the kind of ethic needed to establish government. Calvin and the Puritans gave great attention to the problems of organized society. The modern Social Gospel sought to combine Christian insights with the methods of the social sciences. Contemporary theologians have worked continuously on the nature of social ethics, which must balance the good of individuals against society, of one group against another.

In all these efforts statistical morality plays a part, though not the whole part. The Middle Ages developed the ethic of the just price—a form of statistical morality designed to protect the many buyers from the fewer sellers. With increased production modern society lets the mechanism of the market adjust prices for the most part. But we retain the medieval doctrine in wartime price controls, and in regulation of public utilities and transportation.

Medieval ethics of war included a statistical element. Defensive war always means that some die in an effort to defend others. In requiring of a "just war" that the harm done be not greater than the good to be realized, Christians introduced a further element of statistical calculation. But when they insisted on protection for noncombatants and condemned treachery, they made qualitative judgments independent of numbers. The peculiar ethical horror of modern war lies partly in the sheer quantity of destruction, partly in the loss of old restraints that are not just statistical.

The solutions of the past must give way to new solutions in our time. I refer to them only to show that the Christian ethic has traditionally taken some account of the problems Mr. Weaver discusses, without resolving these problems by solely statistical considerations.

III.

Two aspects of modern life intensify the statistical side of ethics. First, society is more complex, with the result that political and social decisions help some people and hurt others on a vast scale. Second, social change, which is extremely rapid in our time, harms some as it brings opportunities for others.

Thus the increased productivity of agriculture

and automation in industry raise the standard of living, but cause dislocation for some people. The ethical problem is not simply to encourage both because more people will gain than lose, but to work out the adjustment with concern for everyone. To ignore statistics is inefficient and immoral, but statistics must not override the problem for the few.

Racial desegregation is a still more complex matter. I think it can be shown that in the long run the whole society will benefit from this vast social change. But the process makes many people cry in real or imagined pain. The ethical point is that *even if* more people should lose than gain by the change, segregation is still wrong. Like slavery it hurts some for the advantage of others. It is immoral.

The use of nuclear weapons is a final example. The first use of atomic bombs has been justified on the grounds that it shortened the war, thus sav-

ing more lives than it destroyed. That is a debatable judgment. But *even if* it is true, it does not settle the problem. The loss of ethical sensitivity and the damage to America's moral stance in the world are important non-statistical factors in ethical reasoning.

In facing the great issues of social ethics in our time Christians must increasingly look to the social sciences for understanding of processes and clarification of possibilities. Statistics are part of the apparatus of these sciences. Society will face further dilemmas where it must count those who gain and those who lose by new courses of action. The peculiarly Christian ethical contribution will be a sensitivity to the needs of men, an understanding of the relation of men to society and to God, an awareness of human motivation, a concern for the persons who get lost in the masses. Christian ethics will often use statistics to clarify problems. It will seldom find that statistics solve a problem.

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